

China in the International Conflict-management: Darfur as a Case

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Due to Chinese typical economic and strategic interests, diplomatic philosophy, cultural and psychological tradition, China's positions, principles and approaches on the Darfur issue-resolution was somehow different from those of Western countries, which also characterized the conflict-management of China in this issue. This article will review the China's policy on Darfur issue and analyze the role that China played in it, then generalize this state's conflict-management approach on international hot issues.

I. Chinese Policy over Darfur: from Neutrality to Engagement

Generally, Chinese policy on Darfur issue experienced three stages: indifference, persuasion and actively involvement. This policy change reflected the China's adherence to its national interests, its care for the international responsibility and the change of international politics.

1. Stage one: indifferent to Sudan's affair

When military conflicts happened in the Western part of Sudan, China didn't pay much attention to them and even two people were kidnapped in March 2004 in that region. Chinese leaders were successfully persuaded by Sudan government that made Chinese leaders believe what happened in Western Sudan was just local violence that could be controlled by government.

In addition, China refused to sanction Sudan when the UN planned to adopt one US-supported resolution imposing sanction on Sudan. China explained that what was happened in Darfur was not a "racial genocide" but an internal conflict between different tribes who competed for resources.

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2. Stage two: persuading Sudanese central government to accept the UN's suggestions

However, China's policy toward Darfur issue had a subtle change from the indifference or neutrality to actively persuading Omar Hassan al-Bashir authority to accept UN's resolutions.

In August 2004, Lv Guozeng, the Chinese special representative to Darfur, visited Sudan where he confirmed the roles of AU and the League of Arab States (LAS) in dealing with Darfur crisis, and stated China hoped Khartoum could comply with the UN's resolutions^①. He also argued China would provide 5 million Chinese Yuan-valued materials as humanitarian assistance for Darfur crisis.

In November 2006, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao talk to Bashir in Beijing that China supported the UN's 1706 resolution, hoped Sudanese government could comprehensively cooperate with international society and implement the UN's resolution and Darfur Peace Agreement.^② Chinese President Hun Jintao, also extended the same message to Bashir, and especially hoped Sudanese government could accept the AU-UN joint peacekeeping force.

3. Stage three: cooperation with international society

Since 2006, China took more active action to deal with the Darfur issue through three ways- pressing Sudanese government to accept international resolutions; promoting to build a joint peacekeeping troop; and coordinating with related actors in international society.

-- Pressing Sudanese government

In March 2008, Liu Guijin, the Chinese special representative to Darfur, stated that Sudan's government must do much more, stopping competing for lands with rebel groups. Meanwhile, China didn't veto the UN's 1769 resolution which decided to appoint an UN-led peacekeeping troop to Sudan, working with the AU's army, yet a joint-troop was opposed by Khartoum.

^① In this 1556 resolution, the UN asked Sudan's government to relieve weapons of Arabian militias in Darfur.

^② Wen Jiabao: China-Sudan Relations Are Equal and without any Private Interests, see China's News website, 3 November 2006, <http://www.sina.com.cn> <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2006-11-03/202211419625.shtml>.

The pressure to Khartoum also accompanied with Beijing's balance policy in North Sudan and South Sudan. For instance, it set up a consulate in Juba. Furthermore, China contacted with South Sudan's leaders of the rebelling groups, e.g., having invited Salva Kiir, the Chairman of Sudan Liberation Movement to visit Beijing two times.

-- Pushing to build joint peacekeeping force in Darfur

In July 2007, Security Council approved the UN's resolution which decided to send an UN-led peacekeeping troop to Darfur based on "Annan Plan". Although China abstained from the resolution, this made the resolution effective, and then the joint peacekeeping force quickly became possible. Helped by China, Sudan had to agree to allow a joint peacekeeping to enter Darfur.^①

-- Coordinating with international actors

In May 2007, the Chinese special representative to Darfur Liu Guijin visited Africa two times after he was appointed less than two months. He talked with Sudan, the AU, the LAS and some Western powers, coordinating with them to reach some shared positions and resolve the Darfur issue with political dialogues.^②

In Beijing's opinion, not only Khartoum but also those rebelling groups should be imposed pressures. Mr. Liu once said China was pressing Sudan to do more to end the violence, but added that rebel groups also shared responsibility.

He also argued that the UN and AU should together handle those technological issues regarding the deploy of peacekeeping troops; all concerned countries in this region should take cooperative action; and the international society, including Security Council members should work together, without sending wrong messages to Sudan and the rebelling groups.^③ He had also complained those rebelling groups were not active to participate in the peace negotiation "is a primary shortage".^④

^① Jim Yardley, China Defends Sudan Policy and Criticizes Olympics Tie-In, The New York Times, March 8, 2008.

^② Gu Guoping, Dong Jirong, The Positions and Policies of China and the US on Darfur Issue: Based on Each Official States and Speeches, International Forum, Vol. 1, 2010.

^③ Chinese Special Representative to Darfur Hold a Press Conference, see Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry website: <http://www.fmp.rcf.gov>.

^④ How Far Is Darfur from the Peace? International Herald, 2 November, 2007.see

For realizing stability and peace, Chinese representative to Darfur had also visited London and Paris, to coordinate with European counterparts. Meanwhile, Chinese representative in the UN also coordinate with other Security Council members in order to put forward a commonly agreed UN resolution.

II. China in the Conflict-management on Darfur Issue: Dynamics, Principles and Approaches

In Darfur issue-resolution process, China played special roles based on special interests and principles through typical approaches as a different player from other powers, especially the US and the European Union (EU).

1. Dynamics: interests and image

Without question, Beijing's policy toward Darfur and its change is embedded in its typical preference on national interests. Because the deep economic ties with Sudan, China didn't have the will to destroy the bilateral relationship, joining the international society to against Khartoum when Darfur crisis was happened in the early time.

However, when early crisis swiftly changed into a humanitarian crisis, China was imposed more international pressure and quietly changed its policy. Clearly this change was also resulted from the worry about the lasting violence in Darfur which would harm Chinese enterprises' interests.

On the other hand, Beijing's policy alteration is also due to one consideration-image, although this can also considered as a quite typical interests. As a rising power, one of China's ambitions is to be accepted as one responsible actor in international society. When Darfur crisis escalated, China was challenged by more international criticism, and then had to care about its international image. According to this, China began to cooperate with international society.^①

2. Principles: sovereign independence, multilateralism, and development

Generally speaking, the principles China used in Darfur issue can classified into three dimensions: sovereign independence, multilateralism and aiming to

<http://news.sohu.com/20071102/n253021675.shtml>.

^① Josh Kurlantzick, China, Myanmar and Sudan: Perusable Idea, New Republic, 4 September, 2010.

development.

The Chinese special representative Liu Guijin had argued that China didn't agree to deal with regional conflict by force and coerce; and the principle Chinese government adhered was respecting Sudan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. After China decided to join in the international action for resolving Darfur issue, it adhered to the multilateralism as an important principle. It strengthened all actions aiming at Darfur issue-resolution should be under the UN's leadership and through multilateral negotiations, dialogues and cooperation, not only among international actors like China, the US, the AU and so on, but also among different political groups in Sudan.^①

At the same time, Chinese considered that promoting Sudan's development was the fundamental and essential principle to reduce the conflict in Darfur, since the poverty and backwardness was the root of the conflict. Zhai Jun, one Chinese special representative to Darfur claimed the essential road to resolution of Darfur issue was to realize the region's economic reconstruction and development.

3. Approaches: persuasion, cooperation, coordination and political dialogue

The approaches that China used in the Darfur issue-resolution are political dialogues or diplomatic means. Liu Guijin had said "there is only one way to solve the problem in Darfur only through dialogue and consultation."^② According to this, sanction was not preferred by China, diplomatic approach- persuasion, cooperation, coordination, negotiation and so like these, rather than sanction and unilateral action was the unique way that China choose to use in Darfur issue. Liu Guijin had concluded one of the principles used in Darfur issue was adherence to political approach.^③

^① Chinese Representative Explained Chinese Government's Position over Darfur, see China website, 22 February 2008: www.china.com.cn.

^② Gwen Thompkins, Chinese Influence In Sudan Is Subtle, NPR, July 29, 2008: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92282540>.

^③ Wang Yaping, China and Darfur Issue, cited from Carnegie's Perspective on China, 8 September 2007.